DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 336 CG 018 571

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TITLE Do Men Really Fear Nurturing?
PUB DATE Aug 85
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (93rd, Los Angeles, CA, August 23-27, 1985). Figures 1, 2, and 3 may not reproduce clearly.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Androgyny; Child Caregivers; College Students; Fear; Higher Education; *Males; *Personality Traits; *Sex Differences; *Sex Role; Sex Stereotypes
IDENTIFIERS *Babysitters; Femininity; Masculinity; *Nurturance

ABSTRACT

Despite recent research showing men capable of nurturing behavior, most men remain reluctant to care for children. Some researchers have suggested that men are fearful of nurturing as a result of traditional sex role socialization while others have suggested an increased role of external factors in explaining the lack of men in child care (pay, status, social stereotypes). To further examine the issue of nurturance, 78 male and 84 female college students read one of ten babysitting scenarios which varied according to sex of babysitter and type of care provided (refusal to sit; minimal care; masculine, feminine, or androgynous care). After reading the story, subjects evaluated the babysitter using the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ), the Semantic Differential, and the Life Events Questionnaire. On the PAQ, subjects rated the character who refused to sit as most masculine, followed by the character in the masculine scenario. The character in the feminine scenario was rated as most feminine. Analysis of Semantic Differential scores revealed three factors: niceness, competence, and activity. The feminine babysitter, whether male or female, was rated nicest and the feminine, masculine, and androgynous caregivers were rated most competent. The results suggest that the perception of nurturing people as masculine or feminine depends on the gender of the evaluator and the person doing the nurturing. These findings do not support the views that men fear nurturing or that nurturing men are devalued. Social and economic factors may offer better explanations for the low levels of child care done by men. (TW)

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Do Men Really Fear Nurturing?

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Paper presented at the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles, August, 1985.

Abstract

To examine the male "fear of nurturing," college men and women evaluated male and female characters in five stories. The characters: 1.) refused to babysit, 2.) babysat with minimal caretaking activities, 3.) babysat with a masculine style, 4.) babysat with a feminine style, or 5.) babysat with an androgynous style. The "refuser" was considered most masculine but was consistently devalued. The feminine babysitter, whether male or female, was thought nicest and the feminine, masculine, and androgynous caretakers were thought most competent. Results lend no support to a generalized male "fear of nurturing."

Do Men Really Fear Nurturing?

The care of infants and young children has traditionally fallen to women. Nurturance toward the young has been considered a basic aspect of female gender role behavior in many cultures (Ember, 1981) and in western societies women and girls are still over-represented in the ranks of babysitters and child care workers. Recently, however, many researchers have studied men's abilities to behave nurturantly toward infants and young children and concluded that men are capable of behaving nurturantly and often do so in uniquely playful ways (e.g., Bronstein, 1984; Berman, 1980; Nash & Feldman, 1981). The question remains as to why men are not more willing to care for children.

At a recent convention of the American Psychological Association, Draper and Gordon (1983) offered one answer to this question. While acknowledging the exploratory nature of their research, these authors argue that "(T)the apparent male aversion to teaching in the preschool or caregiving in the day care center, jobs requiring no small amount of nurturing interaction with children, may be analogous to the female aversion to success (Draper & Gordon, 1983, p. 5)." That is, men have internalized a <u>fear of nurturing</u> as a result of traditional sex role socialization. This fear creates negative expectations about nurturing behavior because such behavior violates male sex roles, which may then lead to social rejection. This conclusion is offered as both an extension of prior research on females' <u>fear of success</u> and as an explanation of the practical problem of why males avoid child care professions. While an intriguing possibility, we wish to show that: (a) the Draper and Gordon study does not support a fear of nurturing and that (b) the notion of fear of nurturing in males, as a parallel to fear of success in women has little explanatory value.

The theoretical status of a male fear of nurturing, analogous to women's fear of success seems problematic. The validity and utility of Horner's original theory has been in question for sometime. In an extensive literature review, Condry and Dyer (1976) have shown that fear of success is heavily influenced by situational variables and may even be a subtle form of blaming the victim (i.e., no wonder women don't succeed; they fear success!). These authors conclude that "Horner's concept seems not to represent a fear of success, but rather a fear of the negative consequences incumbent upon deviating from traditional sex-role standards in certain situations" (Condry & Dyer, 1976, p. 75). This conclusion seems more and more evident in all areas of sex-role research. As this literature has matured, global internal trait explanations seem overly simplistic. There is now an emerging awareness, that the social environment in which behavior occurs, along with sex-linked social conditions and stereotypes, have more to do with observed gender differences than do internal trait differences between males and females (Deaux, 1984). Eagly and Wood's (1982) work, for example, shows that people's perception of women as more susceptible to social influence than men, reflects women's typically lower social status rather than a personality characteristic of women. When status and social influence are varied systematically, sex differences disappear.

This literature suggests that a fear of nurturing in males, as a parallel to fear of success in women, is on shaky ground from the beginning. While there are interesting and important questions about how nurturing and non-nurturing behavior in males is perceived, we should be very cautious about inferring stable internal traits to explain these perceptions. Put more directly, recent critical reviews would suggest that the small numbers of men in child care professions may have less to do with an internal drama involving a fear of nurturing and

much more to do with an external drama concerning pay, status and social stereotypes about "women's work" (c.f. Deux, 1984; Caplan, 1984; Ferraro, 1984; Klein & Simonson, 1984).

Unfortunately, methodological shortcomings in the Draper and Gordon study leave open the empirical question of whether nurturing males are evaluated more negatively than non-nurturing males. Draper and Gordon told only two stories. These stories concerned male babysitters, one of whom refused to respond to the children's requests for hugs and backrubs; the other of whom did so spontaneously and was said to enjoy it. These stories constrain participants' responses in value-loaded ways and provide evidence for fear of nurturing only because responses were so-labeled. The fear of nurturing interpretation was also mooted by failure to include female participants and to vary the sex of the story character. Results showed weak support for a fear of nurturing. So, for example, overall evaluations of the two babysitters showed higher evaluations for the nurturing rather than the non-nurturing male. Only by arguing that being seen as "good" is actually "bad," in traditional male sex roles, can the authors make their findings fit the "fear of nurturing" interpretation.

The present study replicates some aspects of the Draper and Gordon study, but systematically varies both the sex of participants and babysitters. Stories were constructed to offer a wide and realistic array of interactions between babysitters and children, to evaluate how different levels of nurturing interaction with young children are perceived.

Method

Subjects

Participants (78 male; 84 female) were students from several sections of an introductory psychology course at a midwestern university. They were offered extra credit in their course for their help. All were white; most had small town or rural and somewhat conservative backgrounds.

Procedure

During class meetings students were invited to donate about 15 minutes of their time to contribute to a study of people's attitudes toward babysitting. Volunteers then signed up for one of several sessions during which they would be asked to complete a questionnaire, and then be told in more detail about the project.

At the sessions each participant received a booklet that first described one of ten different babysitting scenarios. These "stories" varied according to: 1) sex of babysitter (sex of children was not indicated), and 2) type of care the babysitter provided. In Story 1,

> John (or Mary), age 20, is asked to babysit his neighbor's pre-schoolers. Because he doesn't like to look after children, John refuses.

Story 2 outlines minimum caretaking:

> John, age 20, is asked to babysit his neighbor's preschoolers. John agrees to babysit. The following is a list of things John does with the children:
>
> -feeds them
>
> -watches them play
>
> -puts them to bed

Stories 3, 4, and 5 all used the same stem, but added typically masculine styles of caretaking, feminine styles, or both masculine and feminine styles. In Story 3, the masculine story, the outline read:

-feeds them

-watches them play

-plays soccer and baseball with them

-rough-houses them (wrestling, tickling, etc.)

-takes them fishing

-plays soccer with them

-puts them to bed

In Story 4, the feminine story, John

-feeds them

-holds them in his lap and hugs them

-watches them play

-reads to them

-sings to them

-puts them to bed

Story 5, the androgynous story, combined all nine of the items from Stories 2, 3, and 4:

-feeds them

-holds them in his lap and hugs them

-watches them play

-plays soccer and baseball with them

-rough-houses them

-takes them fishing

-reads to them

-sings to them

-puts them to bed

Booklets that began with one of these stories were randomly distributed to particpants. After reading a story, each subject evaluated the babysitter using three questionnaires bound into the booklet following the story page. Questionnaires were in the same order in all booklets.

The first measure was the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ), a measure of androgyny (Spence & Helmeich, 1978). Responses to the PAQ indicated both how masculine and how feminine participants believed story characters to be.

The second measure had participants evaluate story characters using the semantic differential. The 19 bipolar adjectives used by Draper and Gordon (1983) were used. These included pleasant-unpleasant; weak-strong; tense-relaxed; hard-soft; well adjusted-maladjusted; active-passive; tough-tender; good-bad; polite;impolite; feminine-masculine; wise-foolish; worthless-valuable; quiet-restless; honest-dishonest; rugged-delicate; disobedient-obedient; fast-slow; competent-incompetent; clean-dirty. Although Draper and Gordon (1983) designated a priori which of these pairs measured the standard semantic factors of evaluation, potency, and activity, as well as two additional deminsions of masculine-feminine and rule-following, a factor analysis of responses was carried to identify the dimensions underlying subjects evaluations of characters in the present study.

The third measure, also taken from Draper and Gordon (1983), assessed participants's conflicts about nurturance. This was an 11-item future events scale. On a five point scale subjects indicated how likely certain events were to occur in the life of the babysitter about whom they had read. These events were: associates more and more with children; wonders about own normality; becomes famous; is criticized by parents; never marries; enters medical school; is arrested for child abuse; become wealthy; worries about rejection by friends; wonders if life is worthwhile; throws a wild party. According to Draper and

Gordon (1983), conflicts about nurturance are supposed to be expressed primarily as social rejection, measured by responses to worries about rejection by friends, never marries, and is criticized by parents. A positive attitude, labeled instrumental activity, was tapped by becomes famous, becomes wealthy, and enters medical school.

Results

Personal Attributes Questionaire

A 5 (story) x 2 (sex of character in the story) x 2 (sex of participant) ANOVA was done on each of three scales derived from PAQ: Masculinity (M), femininity (F), and a bipolar scale (M-F). All post hoc tests were Student-Newman-Keuls tests (SNK).

The analysis of the F scale produced a main effect for story, F (4,161) = 69.9, p <.001. Post-hoc tests indicated Story 4, the feminine story, was seen as the most feminine. Stories 3 and 5 (masculine and androgynous) were ranked next, then Story 2 (minimal caretaking) and finally Story 1 (refuses). There was also a significant three-way interaction, F (4,161) = 3.33 p < .02. The major reason for this interaction was Story 3, the masculine story, was very much influenced by who rated whom. People rated babysitters who were not their own sex as being more feminine than babysitters their own sex on this masculine story. This can be seen graphically in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The ANOVA of the M scale also produced a main effect for story, F (4,161) = 6.72, p <.001. Story 2, the minimal caretaking story, was seen as less masculine than the others. There was a three-way interaction here also, F (4,161) = 3.22 p <.02. This interaction is presented graphically in Figure 2. Women rated men as being masculine in all stories. Men's ratings of the Story 1 female character were lower than both men's and women's ratings of either character.

Insert Figure 2 about here

That is, men apparently do not think that a woman who refuses to babysit has many positive masculine characteristics. Finally, men saw Story 4, the feminine story as more masculine than the minimal caretaking story, Story 2, while women rated characters in these stories similarly.

The M-F scale also produced a main effect for story, F (4,161) = 22.09, p <.001, and a significant three-way interaction, F (4,161) = 2.38, p <.05. The main effect indicated that Story 1, about the person who refuses to babysit, was seen as the most masculine, and Story 3, the masculine story, as the next most masculine. Story 4, the feminine story, was the most feminine, with Stories 2 and 5 intermediate. The interaction indicated that the deviations from the main effect were again concerned with the evaluation of the opposite sex characters. Women rated men in Story 3, the masculine story, as more feminine than other characters. Men rated women as more masculine in Story 4, the feminine story, and more masculine in Story 5, the androgynous story. The M-F ratings can be seen in Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 about here

These results are obviously complicated and deserve some clarification. Overall, Story 1, about the person who refused to babysit, was seen as most masculine, with Story 3, the masculine story, as next most. Story 4, the feminine story, was seen as the most feminine. The interactions revealed complex relationships between the sex of the story character and that of the person evaluating the story which differed from story to story and varied from scale to scale. An interesting observation was that women often rated women in the way that men rated men, but the opposite sex characters were rated differently.

Semantic Differential

The story characters were rated using 19 adjective pairs on a seven-point scale. The ratings of these adjective pairs were factor analyzed using the principal factoring method and varimax rotation. The factor analysis revealed three factors. The first factor, which we labeled "niceness," accounted for 68.2% of the variance. The second factor, "competence," accounted for 23.6% of the variance, and the third, "activity," accounted for 8.2%. The adjectives and their factor loadings can be seen in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

We treated the variables that loaded high on each factor as subscales of the semantic differential, and devised simple subscale scores (sums of ratings) for each dimension. The three scores were then analyzed with a 5 x 2 x 2 ANOVA. SNK tests were conducted as needed.

The ANOVA of the "niceness" scores produced a main effect for story F (4,161) = 44.11, p <.001. The character in Story 4, the feminine story, was seen as the nicest. The androgynous character was ranked next, then the masculine and minimally caretaking characters and finally the character who refused to babysit. Neither the character's nor the participant's sex affected these ratings and there were no interactions. This analysis is presented graphically in Figure 4.

Insert Figure 4 about here

The ANOVA of the "competence" scores also produced a main effect for story, F (4,161) = 20.73, p <.001. The characters in Stories 3, 4 and 5 were seen as equally competent. The minimal caretaker in Story 2 was rated

less competent and the one who refused to babysit the least competent. Again there were no interactions. This anlaysis is presented graphically in Figure 5.

Insert Figure 5 about here

The ANOVA of the "activity" factor's scores also produced a main effect for story, F (4,161) = 15.33, p <.001. The characters in Stories 1, 3 and 5 (refused, masculine and androgynous, respectively) were seen as more active than those in Stories 2 and 4. This analysis is presented graphically in Figure 6.

Insert Figure 6 about here

Life Events Questions

The students rated their character on the 11 items used by Draper and Gordon (1983). They were asked "How likely would any of these future events be in the life of the person in your story?" and provided with a 5-point scale ranging from very likely to very unlikely. Each question was analyzed with a 5 x 2 x 2 ANOVA and appropriate SNK tests.

Three items were used by Draper and Gordon to measure social rejection. The item "worries about rejection by friends" produced a main effect for sex for story character, F (1,161) = 6.52, p <.02. Females were thought to do this more. The other two items in this category, "is criticized by parents" and "never marries," had main effects for story, F (4,161) = 9.58, p <.001 and F (4,161) = 18.76, p <.001, respectively. Both the male and female characters in Story 1, who refused to babysit, were thought the most likely to have these things happen while the other characters didn't differ from one another. These results clearly do not support the notion that nurturing males would be rejected or even evaluated differently from nurturing females.

Draper and Gordon also used three items to measure instrumental activity. Two of these items, "becomes wealthy" and "becomes famous" produced no significant effects. The third, "enters medical school," produced a main effect for sex of participant, F (1,161) = 13.99, p <.001. Females thought this more likely for all story characters. Therefore these items indicated no evidence of fear of nurturing.

The other life events questionnaire used by Draper and Gordon were considered by them to be fillers and were not analyzed. We, however, did analyze them. Two produced main effects for story. The item "associates more and more with children" produced a significant effect, F (4,161) = 33.67, p <.001 and this ranking of stories from least to most likely: 1 < 2 < 3 = 4 = 5. We thought the item "is arrested for child abuse" to be an important item and it also produced a significant main effect for story, F (4,161) = 21.40, p <.001. Regardless of sex, the character in Story 1 was considered most likely to abuse children and the characters in Stories 4 and 5, the feminine and androgynous stories, least likely. The character in Story 3 (masculine) was believed to be more likely to be abusive than those in Stories 4 and 5 but less than the character in Story 1. Story 2 had an intermediate ranking.

Discussion

In this study college students evaluated male and female story characters who either refused a request to babysit, or who babysat with one of four different styles: minimal caretaking, masculine, feminine or androgynous. The characters were evaluated with the PAQ, the semantic differential and a series of potential life events.

The primary purposes of the study were to test the concept of male "fear of nurturing" and to examine how men and women babysitters might be evaluated as a function of differing styles of caretaking.

The first evaluation of the story characters, the PAQ, is a measure of masculinity, femininity and androgyny. This measure produced the most complex results with 3-way interactions occurring on all scales (M, F, and M-F) of the PAQ. Evaluations of the masculinity and femininity of story characters were often affected by the gender of both the evaluator and the character. In general, however, the character in Story 1, who refused to babysit, was seen as most masculine, especially if male. The character in the story we labeled masculine (Story 3), was seen as next most masculine. Story 4, the story we labeled feminine, was seen as most feminine. As a rule, the androgynous and minimal caretaking story characters were ranked in the middle with respect to masculinity and femininity. One can conclude two things from these results. First, these data are consistent with our labeling of the babysitters. For example, the masculine babysitter was seen as masculine and the feminine as feminine. Secondly, it is reasonable also to conclude that the perceptions of nurturing people as masculine or feminine is complicated and depends on the gender of the evaluator as well as of the person doing the nurturing. This is intriguing and fits well with the gender-role literature showing how much gender role behavior is affected by social variables (Deaux, 1984).

The second evaluation was the semantic differential. A factor analysis indentified three factors which we labeled niceness, competence, and activity. The findings here were quite straightforward and not affected by the gender of either the participant or the story character. The character in the feminine story, whether male or female, was seen as the nicest. The androgynous character was ranked next, then the masculine and minimally caretaking characters and finally one who refused to babysit. The refuser was also seen as less competent than all others. The three caretakers who did the most with the children , the feminine, masculine and androgynous caretakers, were all

seen as equally competent and more so than the other two. The analysis of activity showed the refuser, masculine and androgynous caretakers to be more active than the feminine and minimal caretakers. What is most important about these results is that people who care for children are valued and seen as competent whether they are male or female.

We had wondered, for example, whether males would be valued more if they cared for children with a masculine style rather than a feminine. However, this was not the case. The feminine caretaker was thought nicer than the masculine but both styles were seen as equally competent whether done by a male or female. It is encouraging to know that caretaking is valued and that people believe different styles of caretaking are equally competent. The important thing seems to be doing something with the children rather than just watching them or refusing to care for them. It is clear that the person who refused to babysit was devalued--thought to be not nice and incompetent albeit active and masculine.

The analysis of the life events question again supported the conclusion that the refuser was devalued and that gender was not a very important consideration. Refusers were thought more likely than others to be criticized by parents, not to marry, associate less with children and to be arrested for child abuse.

Clearly then, these results do not support the idea that men fear nurturing or that nurturing men would be devalued or criticized. It is, of course, important to repeat these findings in populations of older men and women. However, the most important finding of this study is to abandon the notion that personality factors, such as fear of nurturing, explain why men do not engage in more child care. It is important to turn to an examination of the social and of course the economic pressures which are more likely explanations of the low levels of child care done by men.

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Table 1

Rotated Factor Loadings of the Semantic Differential Adjective Pairs

	Factor		
	1	2	3
	Niceness	Competence	Activity
Adjective Pair			
Pleasant - Unpleasant	-.59[a]	.57[a]	.00
Weak - Strong	.12	-.23	.65[a]
Tense - Relaxed	.68[a]	-.25	.32
Hard - Soft	-.85[a]	-.23	-.10
Well-adjusted - Maladjusted	-.31	.48[a]	-.41[a]
Active - Passive	-.05	.44[a]	-.63[a]
Tough - Tender	.73[a]	-.29	-.29
Good - Bad	-.49[a]	.64[a]	.03
Polite - Impolite	-.50[a]	.69[a]	.15
Feminine - Masculine	-.04	.26	.54[a]
Wise - Foolish	-.27	.68[a]	-.13
Worthless - Valuable	.51[a]	-.35	.25
Quiet - Restless	-.40[a]	.07	.47[a]
Honest - Dishonest	-.37	.61[a]	.16
Rugged - Delicate	.45[a]	-.15	-.56[a]
Disobedient - Obedient	.70[a]	-.30	-.09
Fast - Slow	.06	.50[a]	-.31
Competent - Incompetent	-.33	.60[a]	-.08
Clean - Dirty	-.36	.64[a]	.18

[a]This adjective pair loaded on this factor

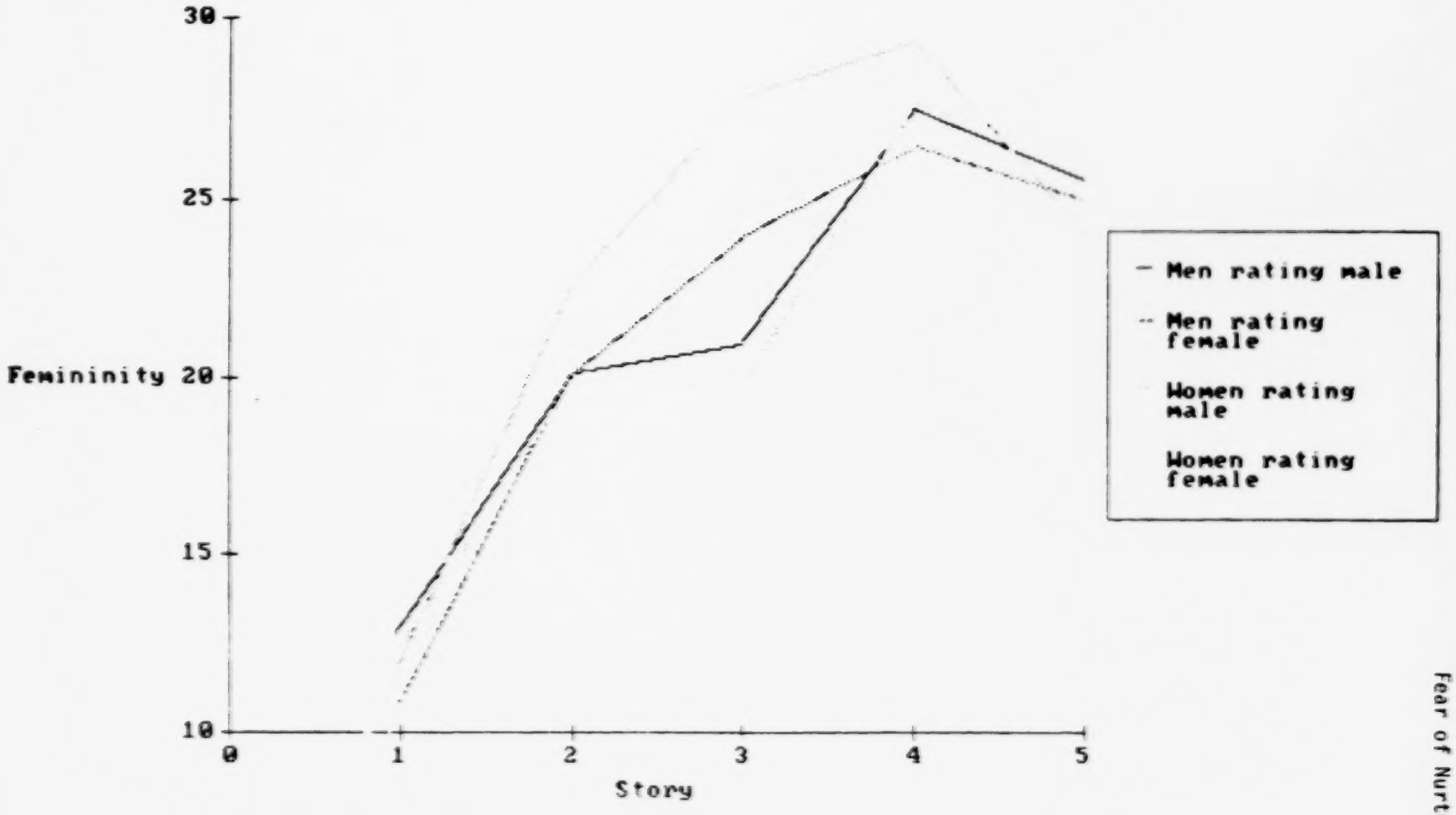

Figure 1. Femininity (PAQ) ratings of the story characters.

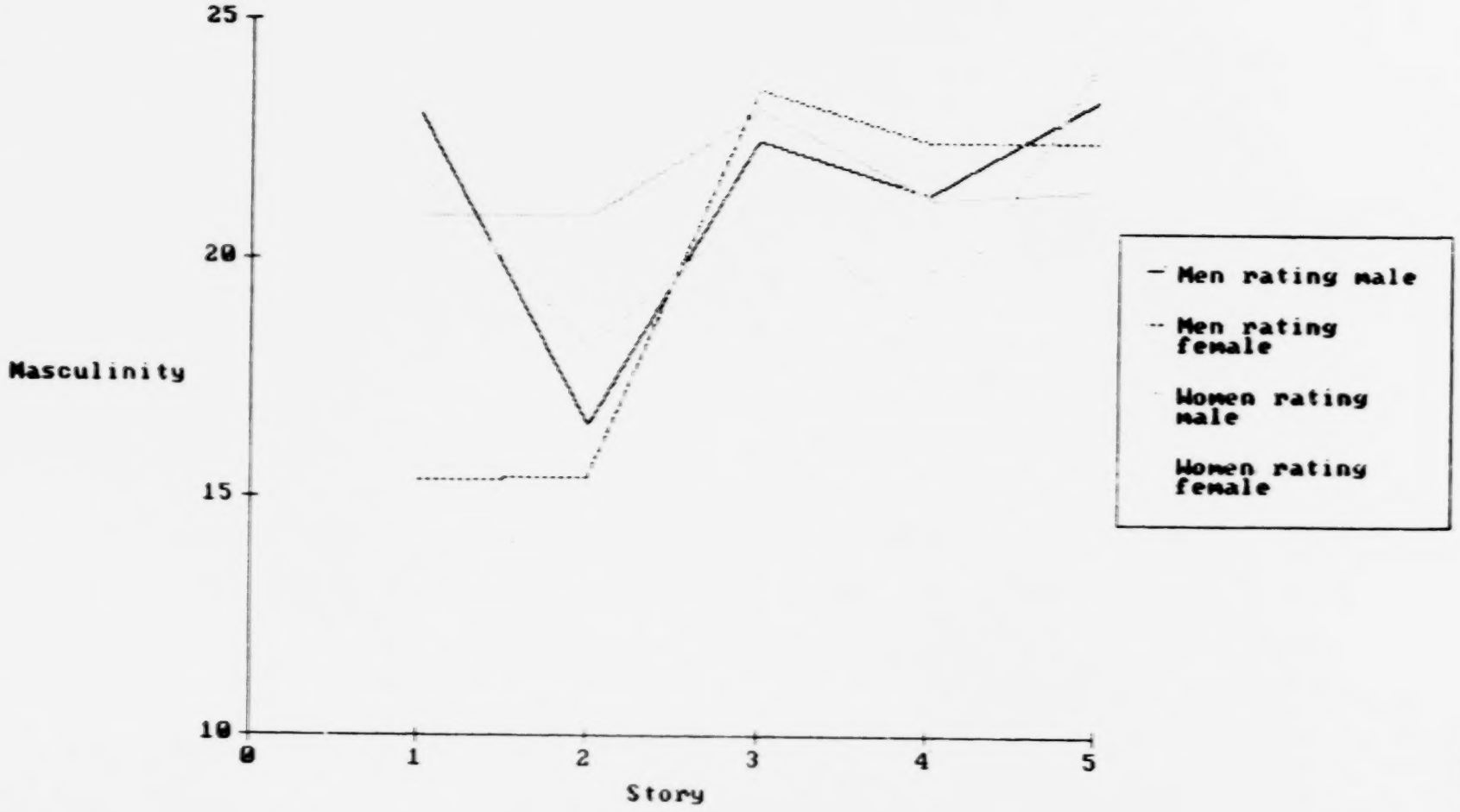

Figure 2. Masculinity (PAQ) ratings of the story characters.

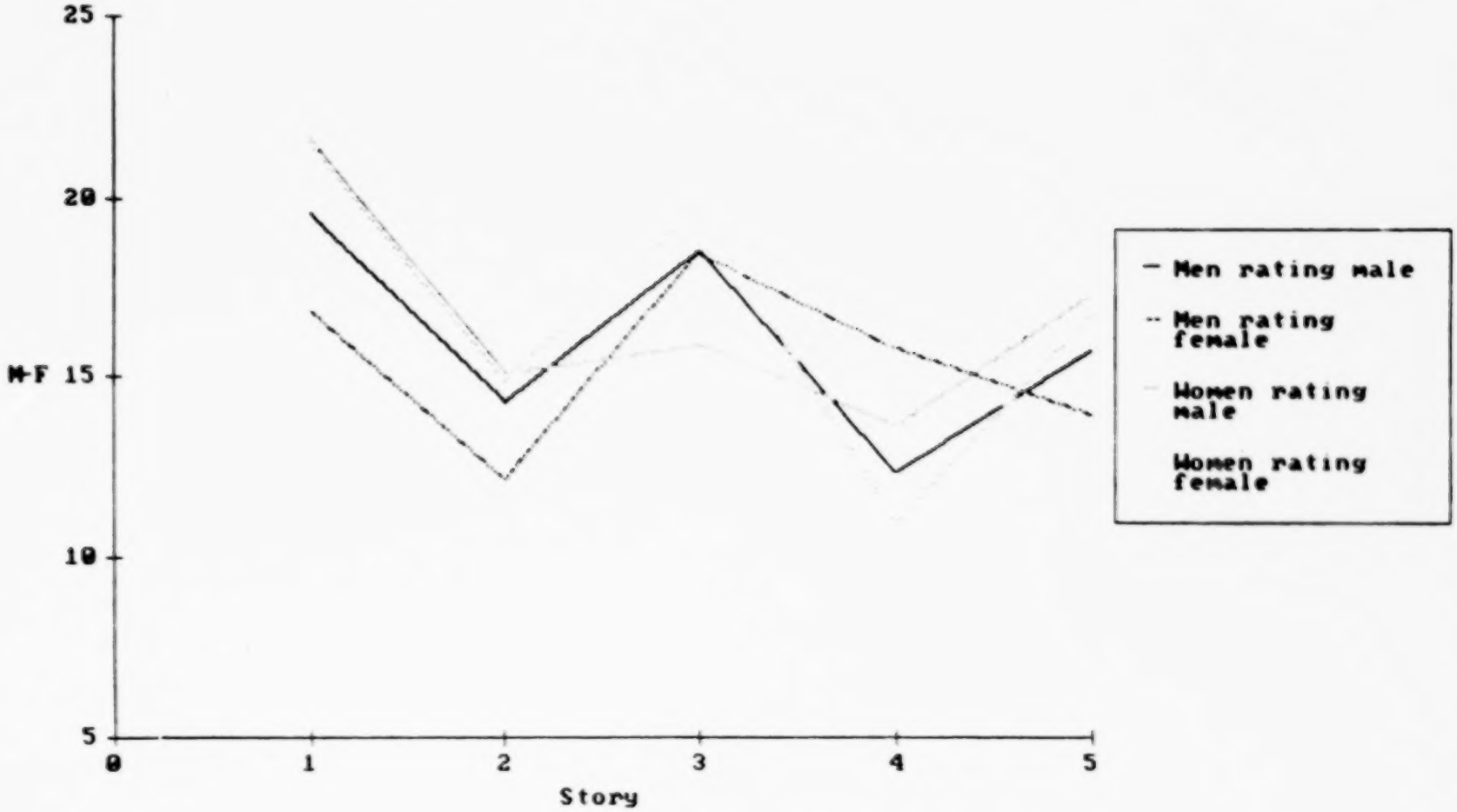

Figure 3. M-F (PAQ) ratings of the story characters.

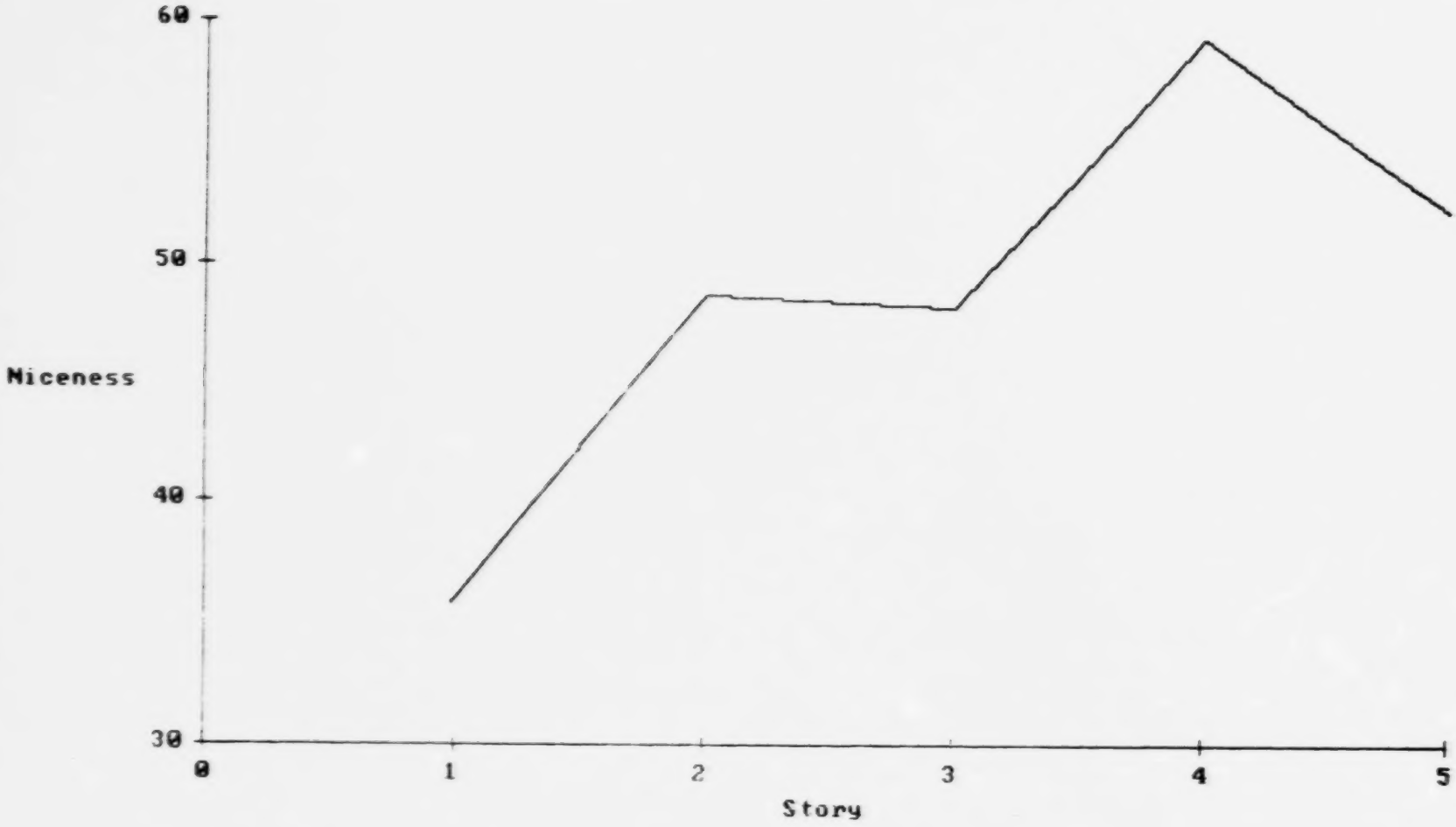

Figure 4. Niceness ratings of story characters.

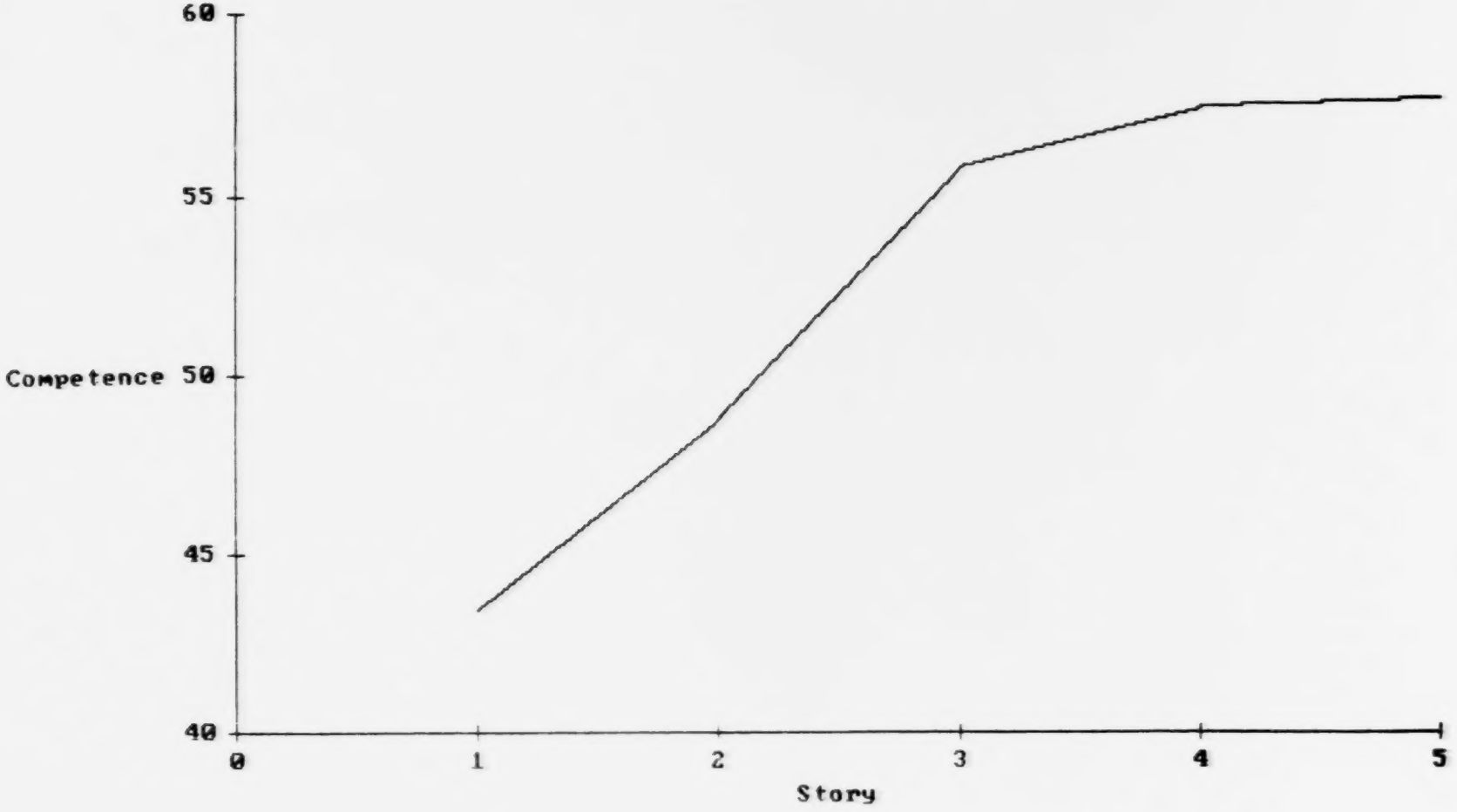

Figure 5. Competence ratings of story characters.

Figure 6. Activity ratings of story characters.